

Historical Criticism and
the Challenge of Theory

EDITED BY

Janet Levarie Smarr

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS PRESS (1993)
Urbana and Chicago

12. "The Problem of Authority," *The Collected Essays of Christopher Hill*, Vol. II: *Religion and Politics in 17th Century England* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1986), p. 47. For a definition of external authority in relation to "the poetic text," see Jacqueline T. Miller, *Poetic License: Authority and Authorship in Medieval and Renaissance Contexts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 5.

13. See *Leviathan*, part 1, chap. 14 and part 2, chap. 18.

14. For modern historical perspectives, see chap. 7. Oliver Omerod, "The Anabaptists and the Reformation," in *Enthusiasm: A Chapter in the History of Religion*, ed. R. A. Knox (New York: Oxford University Press, 1950), pp. 117-138, for special emphasis on links to medieval heresy; see also Irvin B. Horst, *The Radical Brethren: Anabaptism and the English Reformation to 1558* (Nieuwkoop: De Graaf, 1972) for a revision of Foxe's approach to the radical Reformation (pp. 57-58).

15. Oliver Ormerod, *The Picture of a Puritane*, Enlarged ed. (1605), p. 8; Richard Cosin, *Conspiracie for Pretended Reformation: viz. Presbyteriall Discipline* ("Published now by authoritie," 1592), p. 1.

16. Cosin, *Conspiracie for Pretended Reformation*, p. 83.

17. Ormerod, *The Picture of a Puritane*, p. 25.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 70.

19. Richard Bancroft, *A Sermon Preached at Paul's Cross* (London, 1588), pp. 33-36.

20. *Ibid.*, pp. 38ff.

21. Bancroft, *A Sermon Preached at Paul's Cross*, p. 45. The Protestant urge to "search and read" has to do with what Alan Sinfield calls the "Reformation belief of contradictories," insisting "on the need for grace whilst denying any means to obtain it." See *Literature in Protestant England, 1560-1660* (London: Croom Helm, 1983), p. 11. Cf. in this connection Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (III.419): "the more they search and read Scriptures, or divine treatises, the more they puzzle themselves, as a bird in a net" (cited in Sinfield, p. 18).

22. Bancroft, *A Sermon Preached at Paul's Cross*, pp. 41, 42.

23. *Ibid.*, pp. 79, 80.

24. *Ibid.*, pp. 23, 25.

25. Oxford, 1614; rpt. Amsterdam: Da Capo Press, 1969, p. 40.

Marguerite Waller

Historicism Historicized: Translating Petrarch and Derrida

The explosion in Renaissance literary studies of "historical" readings of canonical, noncanonical, and not yet canonical early modern texts bespeaks a passionate commitment to a critical praxis explicitly, as well as implicitly, located in relation to the social forces and political agendas of both the early modern period and our own era. This "new historicism" has been described, defended, attacked, and theorized in ways as heterogeneous as its practitioners, but new historicists seem to be relatively united in writing against the grain of an earlier "literary history," that tended to search its canonical texts for the literarily and morally exemplary, for nonideological models of verbal mastery and social and political comportment.¹ Noncanonical texts, visual material, archival records, and demographics have, meanwhile, begun to figure more prominently in the literary scholar's field of reference, as Marx, Foucault, feminist theory, gay theory, and other analyses of social relations have been introduced to show how implicated the linguistic forms we have called "literature" are in the cultural codes within which subjectivities, values, and epistemologies are constantly being renegotiated. As characterized by Louis Montrose, "its [New Historicism's] collective project is to resituate canonical literary texts among the multiple forms of writing, and in relation to the non-discursive practices and institutions, of the social formation in which those texts have been produced—while, at the same time, recognizing that this project of historical resituation is necessarily the textual construction of critics who are the themselves historical subjects."² Some of the excitement generated by this reconceptualization of the object of study has to do with the new role it seems to offer the scholar-critic. Relieved of the

possibility of being authoritative in the old literary historical sense, the New Historicist's reflections on discursive positions and position-taking seem to authorize a rather appealing "new good guy" role—that of the politically engaged scholar-teacher who can use history to convince readers and students that as Montrose puts it, "history is always now," and there continue to be "possibilities for . . . agency" within our contemporary regime of power and knowledge.³

Although this role appeals to me, too, I am troubled by its reinscription, however subtle, of the pedagogue as moral guide, the very role a rigorous historicist would, it seems to me, necessarily preclude. (That is, it should go against their own grain for historicists, who claim to be as discursively and negotiably put together as their objects of study, to perform ironically the role of moral or political seer.) My disquiet with this reinscription has led me to reconsider one aspect of New Historicism's historiography, for which I would like to sketch an alternative.⁴ I want to call attention to the binary relationship that, in practice, New Historicism seems to set up between the historian and "the past," between, let us say, the present and Tudor England. It seems to me that once the historian's relationship to his or her material is structured this way only two plots are possible. Either the past will turn out to be like the present or it will turn out to be other than, different from, the present. But in both cases "we," the present, remain the principle of intelligibility, the point of reference. This way of knowing ourselves historically repeats the binary logic of "othering" or "saming" that, as Naomi Schor has brilliantly argued, conspires in the very oppressions that many Renaissance literary scholars wish to historicize.⁵ Texts and readers, furthermore, are stabilized by this structuring relationship, short-circuiting from the outset the scholar's impulse toward change, and, incidentally, laying the groundwork for the moralism I noted above.

By contrast, to write, to think, to "know" historically could involve finding a way to allow all the positions at play in our historical investigations mutually and continuously to transform one another. There are, no doubt, innumerable ways of doing so. What seems required in one form or another, though, is a departure from the binary arrangement between present and past. Italianist Juliana Schiesari, for example, in an essay entitled "The Gendering of Melancholia," locates her own position as feminist Renaissance scholar in relation to Freud, also reading Renaissance texts in the formulation of his theory of melancholia, and to two Italian poets, one male and one female, Torquato Tasso and Isabella di Morra. While Tasso's construction of the melancholy subject meshes with Freud's, di Morra's differs strikingly; the relationship between

the two brings the male orientation of Freud's analysis into focus. As Schiesari outlines the project, it has to do with the psychoanalysis of Renaissance texts, the better to understand historical relationships between power and subjectivities, and the historicizing of psychoanalysis, with respect to both feminist criticism and the Renaissance material to which Freud was indebted. "If the very conditions of the patriarchal subject were first made possible in the Renaissance," she writes, "then the combined feminist and psychoanalytic criticism of texts from that period is urgent, not only for a greater understanding of the Renaissance, but also for the radicalization of psychoanalysis itself" (and, she might well have added, for feminist criticism).⁶ Though none of the positions in this investigation remains stable, we are not, therefore, disoriented, but continuously and variously reoriented. Positions (if that is still the appropriate term) are remapped in dynamic relation to each other, so that the project neither falls into indeterminacy nor requires that we privilege one point of reference, not even, or especially not, that of theory.

The kinds of cul-de-sac into which New Historicists sometimes suggest a too self-conscious theorizing would take them presents itself, consequently, as a function of New Historicism's own historiographical model, with its implicit binarism and demand for stability. They are not created, in other words, by the theoretical analysis, which merely foregrounds such historicism's narcissistic structure.

What I propose to do in the following pages is a good deal less complicated than Schiesari's project but begins with the same fundamental moves: an abandonment of the binary approach to figuring historical relationships and a strategy for denaturalizing and reorienting in relation to one another my own position and those of the texts I am reading. I will call your attention to a pattern I have noticed in the rhetorical construction and *modus operandi* of the subject in the English translations of two Romance language texts. My question is, what might we make of the fact that a similar rhetorical sleight of hand occurs on the occasion of each translation, that in each case there is an occlusion of the instability of the (male) subject as he is represented or constructed in the source text and a concomitant change in the way the female subject is figured. By juxtaposing Petrarch's fourteenth-century sonnet 140 with Sir Thomas Wyatt's and Henry Howard, earl of Surrey's sixteenth-century "translations" of it, and by similarly juxtaposing a passage from Derrida's essay "La Différance" with its translation by Alan Bass, I propose to create a "historical" context that gives me a way of thinking about any number of issues—including the historical and cultural specificity of gender identities, the sixteenth-century English

appropriation of Italian culture, and the twentieth-century North American appropriation of French theory—without having to portray myself as a suprahistorical knower. I do not wish to disguise, but rather to emphasize, the complex intertextual cross-referencing that the writing of history always involves—in this case, how Derrida's writing has informed my reading of Petrarch's, Wyatt's, and Surrey's poetry and vice versa how the poetry has motivated the readings and uses I have made of Derrida's writing and how it has shaped my reading of Bass's translation. But if the framing perspective offered by this context is admittedly an effect merely of the arrangement of texts, it will the more readily reveal what, as a would-be historian of subjectivity, I am looking for—that is, significant variations in the rhetorical construction of the subject. Paradoxically, as we will also be able to see from this perspective, rhetorical difference is precisely what escapes analysis, what cannot be seen, when one's historiography depends upon ignoring its own constructedness.⁷

For strategic reasons, let me begin with a brief sketch of the poetic subject in Wyatt's "The longe love, that in my thought doeth harbar."

The longe love, that in my thought doeth harbar
 And in myn hert doeth kepe his residence,
 Into my face preseth with bolde pretence,
 And therein campeth, spreding his baner.
 She that me lerneth to love and suffre,
 And wills that my trust and lustes negligence
 Be rayned by reason, shame and reverence,
 With his hardines taketh displeasure.
 Wherewithall, unto the hertes forrest he fleith,
 Leving his entreprise with payne and cry;
 And ther him hideth, and not appereth.
 What may I do when my maister fereth
 But in the felde with him to lyve and dyc?
 For goode is the liff, ending faithfully.⁸

Wyatt's subject, the lover, tends to structure his experience as a narrative of temporally unfolding, relatively discrete events, beginning with his reference to "the longe love." The phrase in line 8, "With his hardines taketh displeasure," for example, represents love's pressing into the face as an event that causes an effect, the negative reaction of the beloved, which is another event. Cause and effect may be repeatable and repeated, but they are presented as occurring in sequence, occupying separate temporal moments. Similarly, the phrase in line 12, "when my maister fereth," suggests a repeated occurrence but not necessarily a continuous or constant state. All these narrativizing terms, including

the "when" in line 12, allow the narrator who asks "What may I do" to face an apparently real choice. He may choose whether or not to accommodate such moments (harbor them, so to speak). That is, regardless of which choice he makes, these moments do not define him; he defines them.

By structuring the effects of desire as a series of events, the text constructs a perspective apart from, and unconditioned by, the perspective of any one moment it describes. That is, Wyatt's historian displaces the generative element of his narrative (desire or "love") into a temporal series of advances and reversals in a narrative that conceals (or, if analyzed rhetorically, reveals) Love as the constitutive condition of the narration. The autonomous subject implied by the rhetorical form of the narrative, the agent conceptually separate from his actions and passions and therefore capable of interpreting and directing them, is not commensurable with the desiring subject. Desire, whether defined as a lack, or less theologically, as a certain openness to contingency, signals a subject's positioned status.⁹ So positioned, the subject cannot also be autonomous and "know" itself and the world in the authoritative way implied by the narrative of Wyatt's lover. The nontranscendent position of the desiring subject implies as well that its perspective will be temporally contingent. Time, instead of figuring as the continuum within which the autonomous subject could be known and represented, presents itself as the discontinuity between one moment and another that precludes the possibility of their synthesis.

In Wyatt's poem, then, we confront a narrative that presents a situation (active desiring) antithetical to the situation it performs (stable being). The brilliance of the sonnet, from a rhetorical, theoretical perspective, has to do, not with the greater truthfulness, authenticity, or complexity for which English literary historians have ranked it above its Petrarchan source, but with the deftness with which it conceals and exploits its conceptual *aporias*.

Here, let me put as many of my cards as possible on the table. English-speaking literary historians over the past forty years have consistently told a story in which Petrarch's "artifice" is superseded by Wyatt's and/or Surrey's superior "realism." Arguments then focus on whether Wyatt or Surrey is the superior realist. E. M. W. Tillyard in 1949 and Thomas M. Greene in 1982, despite their different styles and approaches, exemplify the gist and conceptual homogeneity of Wyatt/Surrey criticism during the era they bracket. Tillyard writes of Wyatt's "air of unaffected self-expression" and contrasts his "drama" to "Petrarchan convention."¹⁰ Greene offers a highly sophisticated account of Wyatt's exemplification of a certain historical consciousness, a richly nuanced

argument to which I cannot do justice here, in which, nevertheless, Wyatt still comes out distinctly better than Petrarch, morally as well as poetically. "If in the *Canzoniere* the poetic consciousness repeatedly fails to make authentic contact with an external presence, if it constitutes a closed, circular system, in Wyatt our sense of an external presence in any given poem . . . is very strong. . . . Thus the etiological passage from the Italian text to the English can be described as an *engagement* of the closed system with its human surrounding, an opening up to the nonself, an involvement, a contextualization." And, a few pages later he writes, "This suppression of ornament and Petrarchan decorative richness, this imagistic asceticism, is essential to Wyatt's language because it strips the word of its esthetic pretentiousness and leaves it as a naked gauge of integrity."¹¹ Such claims, I will argue, are not supported by rhetorical readings of the sonnets. The investment of either Wyatt's or Surrey's translations with such attributes as presence, transparency, and authenticity may be seen as indicative of a similar investment by the reader in his own interpretive position. That is, if either Wyatt or Surrey can be directly and unproblematically in touch with experience, as an autonomous, authoritative subject, then the critic's position in relation to his material is similarly secure. The result of this literary history, which would tell the story of the progress of poetry toward experience (and of criticism toward poetry) would be the effective concealment of the terms, processes, and structures of its own interpretive position.

The transparency of this kind of critical discourse is already belied, without recourse to deconstructive theory, by the disagreement chronic to the project of assessing the relative merits, or even the substance, of the poetry of Wyatt and Surrey. In this context, the unorthodox response of a woman critic to what has been described by her male colleagues as "rationality" and "empiricism" is worthy of note. Patricia Thomson comments coolly: "The first thing to do in considering Petrarch's influence on English poetry is to disregard the stock notion that he is flattering, unpsychological, artificial, superficial, and unrealistic, and that, in consequence, sixteenth-century English love poetry suffers under these disabilities. If these are found in English Petrarchan poetry . . . their presence proves something about the Tudors, but not about Petrarch."¹² As for English verse forms, an important element in Greene's and others' analyses, Thomson's impression is that especially Surrey's "'advances' were made at considerable cost" (p. 93). In both the article from which I have been quoting and the corresponding chapter of her book, *Sir Thomas Wyatt and his Background*, she clearly considers Petrarch the master poet, both technically and conceptually. The article

concludes, with barely concealed alienation from the whole ethnocentric Wyatt/Surrey debate:

Wyatt's divergence from Petrarch appears to be a perfectly conscious and deliberate thing, an open act of repudiation in favor of opposite values. Surrey, on the other hand, is not aware of clashing values; and he is not a rebel because, for him, there is nothing to rebel for or against. Again, Wyatt was, I think, fascinated by much in Petrarch's imagery, rhythm, and phraseology; but Surrey's literalness and his decasyllabic treadmill suggest the contrary. (p. 105)

Note, though, that Thomson's dissenting opinions operate, however ironically, from within the terms of the problem to be investigated. She does not force the question of the necessity or possibility of judging these poems' "historical importance, intrinsic value, and comparative merits" (p. 86), nor does she question the status of her own critical representation of his poetry.

To conduct an analysis of the representational processes that constitute the positions these critics variously agree or disagree with, I am appealing to an alternative model of historical reading, a "literary" history that is not chronological and does not take the form of a narrative. It would not appear to be definitive or even "historical" in the conventional sense, but it could be revealing of historical significance in the variations and distinctions among texts that it discloses. What I find in Wyatt's and Surrey's sonnets by means of this analysis are poetic subjects no less rhetorically constituted than the poetic subject of Petrarch's sonnet. The rhetorical processes constitutive of the poetic subjects are nonetheless different in all three sonnets, as are the ways in which the subjects' purely rhetorical status is revealed or concealed, accepted or denied, in the appearance of the product of these processes: the represented subject.

When we take a closer look at the lexical and grammatical changes Wyatt has made in translating Petrarch's sonnet, it becomes more apparent that there will be no real contest between desiring and being and that the figure of the female, the beloved, will be exploited to guarantee the privileged status of that being whose gendering as male now comes to seem not coincidental, but constitutive. Here, for comparison, is Petrarch's sonnet 140:

Amor, che nel penser mio vive et regna
e'l suo seggio maggior nel mio cor tene,
talor armato ne la fronte vene;
ivi si loca et ivi pon sua insegna.
Quella ch'amarc et soffrir ne 'nsegna.

e vòl che 'l gran desio, l'accesa spene,
 ragon, vergogna et reverenza affrene,
 di nostro ardir fra se stessa si sdegna.
 Onde Amor paventoso fugge al core,
 laciando ogni sua impresa, et piange, et trema;
 ivi s'asconde, et non appar più fore.
 Chè poss'io far, temendo il mio signore,
 se non star seco infin a l'ora estrema?
 Ché bel fin fa chi ben amando more.¹³

Love, who lives and reigns in my thought and keeps his principal seat in my heart, sometimes comes forth armed into my forehead, there lodges himself (or is lodged) and there sets his banner. She who teaches us to love and endure, and wishes that reason, shame, and reverence rein in great desire and kindled hope (or, who wishes that great desire and kindled hope would rein in reason, shame, and reverence) at our boldness is angry within herself. Wherefore Love flees terrified to my heart, abandoning his every enterprise (also device, motto), and weeps and trembles; there he hides and no more appears outside. What can I do, my lord being afraid (also fearing my lord), except stay with him until the last hour? For a good end he makes who dies loving well.¹⁴

In the opening line of "The longe love," Wyatt virtually reverses Petrarch's representation of a hierarchical relation between love and the self. Where Petrarch's *amor* lives and reigns ("vive et regna"), Wyatt's Love merely "harbars." Actually, Wyatt's poem effects more than a reversal in the sense that Wyatt's touristic Love, consequently, is at the mercy of his host, who does not reciprocally depend upon him the way Petrarch's ruler depends upon that which he rules. Love in Wyatt's version is not simply a subordinate; he is a subordinate *alien*. Nevertheless, nothing would be gained by simply dismissing such a visitor. Wyatt's harbinger is given a legitimate place, a residence, in the poet's heart. This heart, though, unlike Petrarch's, is not the capital of a kingdom that includes the intellect. Wyatt's term "residence" is one possible translation of "seggio," but it loses the technical sense of "seggio maggior," a center of government or governing center, and the change is telling. It splits head and heart into different domains. On the face of it, this is an ingenious strategy for acknowledging desire while dissimulating the contradiction between desire and autonomy. But this strategy also raises a secondary problem. Once the affections and the intellect have been separated or alienated from one other, the repression of one by the other becomes possible. In the next line, just such a repression manifests itself in Love's need to press "with bold pretence" into the lover's face. That the narrator describes the attempt as bold

suggests that Love is not likely to have his claims recognized in the ordinary course of events. That he calls it a "pretence" confirms the suspicion that Love, having first been included, has then been more subtly excluded as constitutive of the subject. This may seem like an antithetical reading of a movement that looks at first like the very opposite of repression, but once again the poem's deviation from the Italian is instructive. The violence of the attempt, greater than in Petrarch's poem ("preseth" rather than "comes"), suggests a love pent up. "Campeth," in the following line, works like "pretence" to subvert Love's title to the territory of the face—a title that Petrarch's neutral "si loca" does not contest.

Having posited a split and alienated subjectivity in the interest of presenting a coherent subject (a fundamentally stable or coherent "face"), Wyatt's lover may now exercise some repressive tolerance toward Love. He may show off the generosity and forbearance with which the autonomous subject deals with such internal rebelliousness, though, by the way he does so, notice, his superiority to and distance from his unruly cohort are ever more surely established. In line 6, for example, as he shoulders half the blame for the disruption Love causes ("My trust and lustes negligence") his role in Love's insurrection appears to have been a passive one, virtually the antithesis of Petrarch's "great desire" and "kindled hope." The beloved's displeasure is similarly construed, in lines 5 and 8, to the lover's ontological advantage: "She that me lerneth to love and suffre. . . . With his hardines taketh displeasure." "She" not only is made to distinguish between the lover and his actions, but, here identified as the source of the demand on the lover to display both desire and the appearance of completeness and autonomy, she also takes the blame for the contradiction we have seen displaced along the narrative axis. Her femininity is constituted precisely, to borrow Naomi Schor's terms, of "the refuse of masculine transcendence."¹⁵ In fact, as happens in other Wyatt translations, too, the figure of woman is the lynchpin in a rhetorical operation that constructs a male subject whose status over the course of fourteen lines is made to appear ever more secure.¹⁶

The sestet presents a thematically brilliant recuperation of the schisms and slippages we have so far discovered in the narrative formulation of that position. In lines 9 through 11 the beloved's displeasure alone is made responsible for the suppression and concealment of Love's claims—"Wherewithall, unto the hertes forrest he fleith, And there him hideth, and not appereth"—leaving the lover free to propose that *his* course of action is to heed Love's "payne and cry." Though he refers to love as "my maister," it is at this point that the lover most decidedly displays his own ascendancy and imperial design, reintegrating the

previously segregated wilds of the "hertes forrest," reclaiming the territory previously reserved for Love, in order to emerge "in the felde," as what looks like a whole and undivided agent, living and dying with Love. This move prepares the way for the final gesture of line 14, where we find the lover making an authoritative declaration vis-à-vis Love that leaves Love not only rhetorically subjugated, but absent as well. "For goode is the liff, ending faithfully" quite literally equates "the subject" with "life" while consigning Love to a lesser, nonlinguistic existence, which the linguistic subject seems both grammatically able and morally obligated to regulate.

One final observation, about the mode of address of this sonnet to the reader or auditor, will prove relevant to the question of how these moves do not at all correspond to the course of the poetic subject in Petrarch's sonnet. Because the poem does not explicitly open to question the status of the narrating subject, it threatens to place us in the same double bind the lover occupies. Just as the lover who has "liberated" himself from the discontinuities that call his narrative position into question could be considered either a momentary victor over the inherent indeterminacy of the subject, or a victim of the rhetorical strategies of concealment and displacement fundamental to the mode of narrative representation through which he would achieve this illusory victory, so we can either ally ourselves with the lover in the construction of the narrative, or participate in the narrative mechanism with an awareness of our own subjugation to its laws of exclusion and displacement. We seem to be offered a choice between performing as misogynist mimetic readers or as resisting rhetorical readers. Either we can treat the subject as "autonomous," capable of knowing and writing history, or, alternatively, we can see in the poem's constitutive narrative a definition of the subject as a kind of nonexistence, a subjectivity so-called, that would simply be incapable of self-representation and "self-knowledge" and therefore incapable of even entertaining notions of individual will and choice. Those Renaissance scholars who would see historicism and rhetorical theory, or even selfhood and rhetorical theory, as antithetical, are, I would argue, caught within precisely this view of the alternatives. But readers who find themselves caught in this kind of discursive trap could conceivably strike out in a third direction. Confronted with such discourse, they may realize that between an illusory subject and an awareness of the properties of that illusion, both of which preclude a historicist epistemology, there is no reason to choose because there is no choice to be made.

I would also like to dwell for a moment upon the way in which the pseudochoices presented to us here are linked to the semantic displace-

ment onto a different sex (which could just as well be a different race or class) of that which, recognized as the self's own, would threaten its assumed integrity and completeness. Thematically the beloved provides the occasion upon which the lover can appear to "act." Because it is the beloved, not the lover, who appears indeterminate and contradictory, this occasion has built into it the possibility or necessity of there being other occasions as well, on which the subject may continue to reinscribe his mastery. (Recall that the narrative structure of Wyatt's poem suggests a repeated and repeatable process.) The rhetorical manipulations both demanded and allowed by the positing of an autonomous, authoritative subject can, in fact, be supported only by the continued repetition (or invention) of such occasions, which remain, however, as epistemologically fruitless as the first.

I find it significant from a feminist, as well as from a deconstructive and/or historicist, perspective that the subject in Surrey's sonnet performs just such a repetition, pushing the strategy, if anything, somewhat further. Certain formal features of the poem suggest that its lover-narrator assumes a position of still greater detachment from the problems of narrative representation and desire than did Wyatt's narrator:

Love that doth raine and live within my thought,
 And buylt his seat within my captiue brest,
 Clad in the armes wherein with me he fowght,
 Oft in my face he doth his banner rest.
 But she that tawght me love and suffre paine,
 My doubtfull hope and eke my hote desire
 With shamfast looke to shadoo and refrayne,
 Her smyling grace conuertyth streight to yre.
 And cowarde love than to the hert apace
 Taketh his flight, where he doth lorke and playne
 His purpose lost, and dare not show his face.
 For my lordes gilt thus fawtless byde I payne;
 Yet from my lorde shall not my foote remove.
 Sweet is the death that taketh end by love.¹⁷

The use of past and future tenses—"And buylt his seat," "with me he fowght," "But she that tawght me," "from my lord shall not"—more definitively than Wyatt's indications of sequence, implies a fixed point or perspective from which the past can be known and the future decided. The couplet, which reverses the direction in which the three quatrains appear to have been tending, serves to reinforce the impression that this poem sets forth an authoritative, self-determined subject. This impression is threatened, on the other hand, by the initial portrayal of Love's sovereignty over the self whose story is being told. If

Surrey's narrator appears to out-do Wyatt's, so does Surrey's Love, who is not a mere harbinger, but who lives and reigns in the Lover's thought, and has "buylt his seat" in the lover's breast. In Surrey's poem we confront a narrative that presents a situation (active desiring) absolutely opposed to the situation it performs (stable being). If the gap between the two situations is still greater here than in Wyatt's poem, the apparent elimination of that gap promises to be no less dissimulating.

With deceptive simplicity, the first three lines of the opening quatrain display this gap as a paradox. Narrative form and narrated content render mutually exclusive subjects. The subject who is completely dominated by Love cannot describe this domination in retrospective narrative terms. The subject who assumes a position of narrative authority cannot claim that he is ruled in every aspect by Love. Nevertheless, the poem suggests, these subjects coincide. The lover's claim in line 4 that Love often appears in his face, freely and against none of the resistance confronted by Wyatt's lover—"Oft in my face he doeth his banner rest" (emphasis mine)—suggests, for example, that they are related as container to contained. As the lover's face is to the Love that appears there, so, it might be supposed, the face or appearance of his language is to the account of Love that it embodies. This positioning of the narrative voice vis-à-vis Love, though, is not allowed to disrupt the narrative structure. The paradox is not resolved but decided, as in fact it has been from the beginning, at the expense of the desiring subject and Love. As this line in particular illustrates, narrative structure is not at all a container-like form that can be disinterestedly filled with a content at odds with itself. It is, instead, the set of verbal relationships from which any and all self-images emerge.¹⁸ What remains in question, even (or especially) after the thematic statement in line 4 "makes sense" of the paradox of the three preceding lines, is the authority on which this sense is being made.

The same question is raised differently by the disposition of certain thematic elements in the quatrain. We are told that the lover retains for himself no territory, no "ground," so to speak, on which to base his narrative authority. But his concession of all vulnerable territories and features (head, heart, and face) to a Love characterized chiefly by the material constructions ("And buylt his seat") and defenses ("Clad in the armes wherein with me he fowght") that constitute and support Love's own authority also effects a separation or distinction between Love and his domain, on the one hand, and the narrating subject on the other. This separation or distinction, like the one we are encouraged to make between form and content, works like a kind of Moebius strip in which what appear to be two sides are always already only one. It defers (or

conceals for the time being) the coherence-threatening contradiction between the situation being described and the discursive mode of the description, but this deferral and the mode of discourse it allows depend in turn upon the distinction (between Love's and the lover's authority) having already been made. The problem we are left with, if we are not to have the voice that makes the distinction already compromised, is to find from where else, other than from the subject-governed-by-Love, it could be coming. If Love governs the entire being of the lover, can the substance or status of the narrative voice be recuperated?

It falls to the beloved (not surprisingly) to provide the occasion on which the narrative may exercise a strategy that would grant the voice the status of an existential being. It follows from the first quatrain that if the narrative voice, separate from the subject whom Love rules, is nevertheless to represent that subject, its position separate from the territories governed by Love must be subsumed within a larger unity. The description in the second quatrain of the beloved's authority over the lover works to establish this unity. Although the lover speaks in line 6 of "My doubtfull hope and eke my hote desire," the grammar of the clause in which this line is embedded short-circuits this gesture toward assimilating Love to the verbal construction of the subject. Because Surrey's lover omits the distinction made in the other two poems between what "she" teaches and what "she" wills, lines 6 and 7 become either an appositive or a correlative to "love and suffre paine." Whichever way one reads these lines, it appears that the beloved has taught him everything he does—doubtfully hoping and hotly desiring, as well as shadowing and refraining—and it is therefore she who appears to be responsible for the situation in the opening quatrain where there was a separation or gap between the lover's mode of discourse and his position in relation to Love.

This position itself is recast by the positing of a beloved who makes such large claims for herself. Love's power over the lover is subsumed by her greater authority over the lover, making Love or desire appear to derive entirely from her. By the same stroke, the lover is endowed with the possibility or capacity he did not yet have in the first quatrain, to perform as if his desire were the nonconstitutive, acquired (from the beloved) characteristic it now appears to be. What the beloved "teaches"—not that the lover repress desire (rein it in both outwardly and inwardly, as in Wyatt's poem), but that he dissimulate ("shadoo and refrayne") it with an outwardly "shamfast" look—is a manifestation of this capacity. It reconstitutes the same subject who was ruled by Love as, here, a disinterested, governing (vis-à-vis Love) being, who conceals his non-constitutive desire legitimately and at will, and who in this sense

appears to have coincided with his narrative self-representation from the beginning. The trick of this poem, the symmetry whereby it would neutralize and discharge the threat of dissolution posed by desire, is this reconstitutive demand by the beloved that would have us efface, that attempts to make us forget, the narrative voice's previous lack of any substantial status.

The large task remaining to the poem is to effect a final reversal in the relationship between lover and beloved. The authority of the beloved must finally be shown to work in the service of the subject it reconstitutes, the subject whose ultimate narrative authority still stands, at this point, in the beloved's shadow. This final recuperation begins in the third quatrain where the strategy whose structure I have been describing surfaces narratively. Love is defeated by the beloved, and the lover appears to be what he claims to be, an innocent bystander to their quarrel. The lover is not moved to sympathy for Love's plight because he does not have to be in order, like Wyatt's lover, to demonstrate his freedom or recuperate some displaced part of himself. Because Love appears to be external to him, he need only sit back and let the battle take its course. Significantly, in this regard, the lover can make a statement in line 12, at the point where there is a question for the lovers of both Petrarch and Wyatt. Surrey's subject, having assumed a more authoritative disentanglement than either of them, neither faces a realization nor confronts a choice. He appears simply to *be*, to "byde," as he puts it, in a godlike "fawtless" state. Only the expression of extreme contempt for "coward Love" gives away, perhaps, this disinterested, dissimulating pose. The narrating voice holds Love in contempt precisely because, and to the extent that, Love's constitutive role in the production of a position from which it is possible to be contemptuous threatens to unmask the lover's appearance of transcendence.

This thematic rendering of the lover's independence from Love provides the context for the poem's striking last turn. In the couplet the narrator reappropriates Love to his own position, not as a constitutive element of that position, but as a kind of aesthetic addition to it. One sense, at least, of "Yet from my lorde shall not my foote remove. / Sweet is the death that taketh end by love," is that the otherwise disinterested subject can choreograph desire's disruption as something to be enjoyed, and that the lover is he who knows how to enjoy it. By means of this reappropriation, the narrating voice usurps even the beloved's authority, for the self previously subordinate to her now appears to make a choice, to act, apart from her, and even against her wishes. The situation masked in the couplet by the pose of the aesthete is, nevertheless, coordinate with the situation presented at the beginning of the poem.

Although the last line of the poem provides a thematic motive—aesthetic pleasure—for the lover's "choice" to remain with Love, the choice *qua* choice otherwise seems odd, a gratuitous recasting of the lover's original complaint that he is consumed and victimized by Love. Furthermore, what is presented as a present and future action is not an action at all, but a continuation of the kind of inaction ("Yet from my lorde shall not my foote remove") that in the beginning characterized the lover ruled by Love. Once we understand that the narrator who makes these distinctions—between staying with Love by necessity and staying with Love by choice, between not being able to remove the self from Love's power and choosing not to do so—is the illusory product of a narrative that conceals the constitutive role of Love in its production, the distance or difference between the beginning of the poem and its ending, between the aesthetic "choice" of a subject and the structure of its desiring, collapses. As in Wyatt's poem, then, the narrative places us within a double bind. Our only alternatives are to accede or not to an image of independent choice that itself precludes the possibility of either independence or choice.¹⁹

Traditionally, English-speaking readers have tended to fault the serics of three hundred and sixty-six *canzoni*, *madrigali*, *sestine*, and sonnets that make up Petrarch's *Rerum vulgariarum fragmenta*, or *Canzoniere* for not achieving the kind of closure presented by the images of the subject we find in Wyatt's and Surrey's translations of Sonnet 140. Read from a position that assumes that readers and writers are, and poems should represent, the kinds of subjects constructed by Wyatt's narrative, Petrarch's poem appears to offer only an image of disequilibrium, uncertainty, and impotence. In the same way that I have been reading Wyatt and Surrey through a Petrarchan lens, though, it is possible to read Petrarch in (nonnarrative) relation to Wyatt and Surrey, whose poems I will use here to bring the specificity of Petrarch's poetics into focus. Such a comparative rhetorical reading will show that Petrarch's subject and the representational processes that produce it constantly and transformatively put each other in question. The status of the speaker as a desiring subject is not dissimulated in the service of creating an illusion of authoritative discourse, nor does the discourse of the poem, which itself is not structured as a narrative, produce the illusion of a stable subject. Instead, at each step of the way, recognitions are generated that retroactively modify the significance of the assertions, recognitions, or questions from which they follow. The text is constantly "changing," implying and helping to produce both a poetic subject and a reader whose nature and status are also being constantly renegotiated.

The opening quatrain:

Amor, che nel penser mio vive et regna
e'l suo seggio maggior nel mio cor tene,
talor armato ne la fronte vene,
ivi si loca, et ivi pon sua insegna

Love, who lives and reigns in my thought and keeps his principal seat
in my heart, sometimes comes forth all in armor into my forehead, there
places himself, and there sets his banner, flag, insignia

immediately presents us with the same *aporia* that structures the opening quatrain of Surrey's sonnet. The subject who claims unequivocally that love governs both heart and head should not be in a position so to describe the movements and gestures of Love, to position Love in relation to himself as if Love were merely an attribute of an essential subject. But Petrarch's sonnet neither insists that these two versions coincide nor demands that the disposition of Love and the lover in these lines be confirmed or given greater coherence by what follows. The paradox is neither resolved nor decided, but is thematically and grammatically acknowledged in the next quatrain:

Quella ch'amare et sofferir ne 'nsegna
e vòl che 'l gran desio, l'accesa spene,
ragion, vergogna et reverenza affrene,
di nostro ardir fra se stessa si sdegna.

She who teaches us to love and to endure and wants reason, shame, and reverence to rein in great desire, kindled hope, with our boldness within herself is angry. Or, equally plausibly, she who . . . wants great desire and kindled hope to rein in reason, shame, and reverence, with our boldness within herself is angry.

The lines may be read either way, Petrarch's dazzling double zeugma very precisely imaging what the beloved is said to want—a subject who both exists and desires. In calling the discourse of the opening quatrain into question, though, the second quatrain does not settle the further question of its own authority. Who or what can we infer to be producing this account of the beloved's criticism? In the tercet that follows, where Love is said to go into hiding, this problem is thematized:

Onde Amor paventoso fugge al core,
laciando ogni sua impresa, et piange, et trema;
ivi s'asconde, et non appar più fore.

Wherefore Love flees terrified to my heart, abandoning his every enterprise-emblem, and weeps and trembles; there he hides and no more appears outside.

Such a description—Love concealing itself and no longer appearing "outside"—could characterize equally well either the discourse of the desiring subject who does somehow control or lend order to its language through reason, shame, and reverence, or the deceptive discourse produced by the dissimulation of the subject as a desiring being. The beloved's reported disdain toward the lover's initial faux pas notwithstanding, the nature of language is such that it cannot be made the ground for such moral or epistemological distinctions. Language itself always displays desire in the sense that the representing subject is always caught in its own indeterminacy—and at the same time this indeterminacy is also concealed by the simulacrum of coherence that language gives to the representing subject.²⁰ Even in the act of calling attention discursively to the disruption of discourse by the condition of its production, language, it seems, can "make sense" only by dissimulating this disruption. Love or desire no longer *appéars* outside at the very moment of, or as a corollary to, any attempt to represent the subject. As the represented action of Love in this tercet dramatizes, though not what the lines themselves can tell directly, however, desire still lies at the heart of what its enterprise or sign ("sua impresa"—about which more in a moment) can only betray—betray in the sense that the sign is untrue to desire and that it nevertheless gives desire over or makes it accessible to representation.

Further symptomatic of the poem's semantic, syntactic, and grammatical instability—and the way in which instabilities migrate from one dimension of the poem to another—is the way the term *impresa*, embedded within this tercet, also comments upon the behavior of the tercet, and, retroactively and proleptically upon the behavior of the sonnet, or, to put a little more pressure on the case, upon the *Canzoniere* (and textuality) in general. *Impresa* can mean "emblem" or "motto" as well as an action, undertaking, or enterprise. The *impresa*, that is, can be seen or read as referring not only to an action that Love apparently undertakes only to abandon, but also to an emblem—perhaps the previously mentioned *insegna* of line 3, a visual figure left where it can be seen, even though its owner cannot make good on its signification. This emblem or figure, embedded in the midst of a literary structure, the sonnet, can function, as I shall explain, to refocus our attention on the unhidden and purely rhetorical structure of the entire poem.²¹ In the line immediately following, Love is said to appear no longer. More precisely, it is *here* (*ivi*) that Love ambiguously either hides himself or is hidden. Love is no longer either active or passive, as the Italian construction "*s'asconde*," which can be translated into English either way, indicates, because we now see that "he" has been (is?—tense begins

to make less and less sense as we go on) implied by a discursive structure. Consistent with the course that the language of the poem appears to be taking in this first tercet are two instances of its echoing, and in the process rereading or rewriting, the opening quatrain—the source, so to speak, of the character-like figures that may seem to have governed our reading of the poem thus far. “*Impresa*,” first of all, sends us not only on to the disappearance of Love “*ivi*” or here in line 11, but back to the first appearance of Love’s “*insegna*,” his banner or sign “*ivi*,” in line 4. If once it seemed possible for Love to be represented within the poem by such a sign, and hence to emerge from and stand free of the poem’s rhetorical structures as a figure of a different order, it now seems that this disposition of figure or image in relation to the poem was a misleading appearance. That banner is rewritten now (or here) as not only the emblem of an undertaking but also as the undertaking of a different kind of emblem.

Actually, the *impresa* of line 10 operates like a very extreme instance of emblem making known as the rebus. The rebus has been described as a kind of visual pun in which a picture stands for words that make up a motto, which, in turn, may refer to some unpicturable concept or circumstance. A picture of an artichoke juxtaposed to a picture of the top of a Greek column, for example, can be read as “artichoke capitol” or, in other words, Castroville, California. In Sonnet 140, the picture itself is also a word—“*impresa*”—which, in its oscillation between pictorial and verbal figuration represents the possibility of a turn or a shift in the figural mode in which the poem might be read. This image, that is, enacts or displays the possibility of seeing/reading the story of the lover, Love, and the beloved as itself a riddle that is always already rewriting itself (and by extension other such stories) as an account of the present moment of its narration. Furthermore, it now becomes arguable that such rhetorical readings can be more “historical” (that is, grounded in temporality) than an epistemologically double-binding historiography that implies and depends upon an illusory, atemporal, essential subject.

The lines we have been working with immediately reward an attempt to respond to this shift in figural mode. Line 4, “*ivi si loca, et ivi pon sua insegna*,” reread now, or here, from the perspective of line 10, may be taken to mean, not simply “here” in the visage or appearance of a poetic subject, but “here” in this poem, “here” in this line, “here” in the poetic circumstances under which Love and the poetic subject may appear to so position themselves in relation to each other. If “*ivi*” is taken to mean “here” in the latter sense, then the ambiguously reflexive or passive form of the verb to locate, “*si loca*,” becomes, not ambiguous

at all, but rigorously precise. It is entirely appropriate and perfectly accurate for the verb to display the passive positioning of Love by the poem as well as the appearance of active self-positioning that the text, read mimetically, makes possible.

By the final tercet the poem has thus raised a whole series of issues having to do with textuality, desire, and the subject—the subject as both representer and represented. It is to these issues, and to the situation of the subject, that the deceptively simple-looking interrogative “*Che posso io far*” (What can/may I do?) seems to refer. Unlike Wyatt’s poem, where this same question appears to present a choice, but, in so doing, merely provides an occasion for the lover to entrench himself in the illusory position that he has implicitly claimed from the beginning of the poem, Petrarch’s contextualization of this simple line presents us with a real, if startling, alternative to the (illusory) autonomous subject. Here grammar is, as usual, significant. The deployment of a simple subject (*io*), verb (*posso fare*) and object (*che*), which is a structure avoided throughout the rest of Sonnet 140, can seem to imply a stable hierarchy of relationships and functions. Grammarians speak of subjects “governing” their verbs and direct objects. Grammatical subjects are usually taken to differ in kind from verbs, the former function usually being performed by a noun or pronoun, which is understood to name an entity, the latter function being performed by words that are understood to indicate the kinds of processes, movements, actions of which such an entity is capable. Here there is no reason not to read the question “What can I do?” as a question about the nature and status of these grammatical structures. How, for example, does an understanding of the operation of the shifter “*io*” influence our understanding of a question that seems to be about the course of action to be taken by a human subject? Is it safe to assume that the attributes of a grammatical category correspond to those of a human subject? These questions about what “*io*” can “do” are logically prior to, and very much to the point of, any moral or philosophical inquiry concerning the subject. And, at least in Petrarch’s poem, a different kind of subject, different from the illusory ontological subject of Wyatt and Surrey, emerges from its asking.

Reading this line in the context provided by the sonnets of Wyatt and Surrey will clarify the trajectory of the Petrarchan conversion to grammatical and syntactical aspects of textuality. Both English sonnets substitute the direct pronoun “*me*”—“*She that me learneth*” and “*But she that taught me*” for Petrarch’s “*ne*” (us) in line 5—“*Quella ch’amare et sofferir ne insegna*”—giving the “*io*” in their respective line 12s an antecedent and apparent referent. “*io*” refers to “*me*,” which, in turn, names a subject defined as initially and ultimately separate from desire

(desire deriving entirely from the beloved), and therefore unproblematically coincident with the autonomous subject implied by the poem's narrative form. As we have seen, though, this subject puts us in a double bind *vis-à-vis* the language that produces it, which can neither be believed nor disbelieved. The absence of a simple, grammatical antecedent to the "I" in Petrarch's sonnet, conversely, refers us either to the poetic subject that it appears to name, or simply, to itself, to the grammatical function of the pronoun "I." The phrase, "*Che poss'io far,*" then, could be read as a question, not only about what kinds of action either the grammatical or the poetic subject is capable of performing, but also, about whether the categories of action and agent, implied by the use of the subject pronoun, are appropriate to the poetic subject as it has been displayed thus far in the poem.

It is not that the possibility of an epistemology of the subject is suddenly opened up, but rather that its possible impossibility and the reasons for this impossibility are beginning to surface in the text. This is not the kind of information or knowledge that a text can state openly or directly, for, as this half line demonstrates, the grammar and syntax of the language in which it would be told are fundamentally unreliable. The function of the grammatical subject and the characterization of the poetic subject are at odds with one another. But even as the question is posed, it displays a space between what it asks and how it asks it that performs a kind of answer, a "doing," or "making" by means of which the grammatical subject and the lover can be distinguished. In this sense "io" works analogously here to the way "*amor*" did earlier in the poem. As the signs of Love or "Love" the sign appeared to be "untrue" to desire, and yet necessary to desire's representation, so here, "io" fails to signify, but helps to trace in language, the course of an unrepresentable subject. Not just analogical, Petrarch's text goes on to suggest, "*amor*" and "*io*," desire and the subject, could be considered interchangeable and indistinguishable. In the perfectly ambiguous phrase "*temendo il mio signore,*" following the question "*Che poss'io far,*" the affinity of the two personae is made explicit by the destabilization of the grammatical boundaries that have kept them separate. The syntax of line 12 becomes indeterminate at this point, lending itself to either a conventional, colloquial reading—"What may I do, my lord being afraid?"—or the more literal "What may I do, fearing my lord?" Or rather both the one reading and the other, though mutually contradictory and non-sense making on a narrative, thematic level, together continue to pose the form of an answer to the poem's question. If, and only if, a conversation is made from reading what one takes to be the story of a life to reading what one takes to be the story of a text, or, as it is put subsequently,

only if the subject who might appear to act, to choose, to narrate, independently of the text, "dies" out of it, can the means of the production or construction of just such a life or subject be glimpsed.

In the remarkable closing line this death finally finds its grammatical enactment. Subjects, verbs, and objects no longer function as separable, stable categories. Lover and love in the form of the relative pronoun "*chi*" and the present participle "*amando*" function as mutually constitutive elements forming the grammatical subject of the verb "*more*" (dies), and the whole clause, verb included, then becomes the grammatical subject of "*fa bel fin*" (makes a good end). Significantly, at this point language no longer presents a problem. It now appears that the ambiguities, indeterminacies, and contradictions encountered along the way could be read as a function of the notion of the autonomous subject rather than as an inadequacy of language. Once the lover no longer tries to write himself as an autonomous subject, the linguistic subject is at last able to perform semantically, syntactically, and grammatically like a lover, which is to say like a contingent, "historical" being, whose "subjectivity" is from moment to moment constantly being renegotiated.²²

To round out this argument, now, we need to return to the figure of the beloved and to the way this poem addresses or positions the reader. What difference to them does it make for the poetic subject, the lover, to be figured so differently from the way he is in the sonnets of Wyatt and Surrey? The beloved, significantly, does not appear unreasonable or irrational. On the contrary, she figures as that which keeps the lover from maintaining an unreasonable, irrational, self-contradictory, delusional subject position. If this version of the beloved does not necessarily bespeak Petrarch's feminism, it nevertheless gives Laura (the name given the beloved throughout the *Canzoniere*), no less than the lover, the status of a relational figure. Indeed, sexism and misogyny as we know them, involving the objectification and exploitation of women to maintain the illusion of the sovereign (male) subject, cannot come into being when subjects are written and read as Petrarch reads and writes them. As a pun often made in the *Canzoniere* between Laura and *lauro* (between Laura the beloved and the laurel wreath of the triumphant poet) suggests, she functions as language itself does in the sequence, as a complex figure for the figurality of all subject positions.

The reader's position, of course, must be included among these. It has been difficult to offer an exegesis of this poem because the reader is never offered a stable position from which to read. As we have seen, lines and stanzas are not linked by the indications of temporal sequence that would bind together (though ultimately undo) the sonnets of Wyatt and Surrey. On the other hand, Petrarch's reader is not being entrapped

in, and epistemologically disempowered by, the image of an essential, if illusory, subject. Nor is that reader, by implication, gendered male. On the contrary, as the *laura-lauro* device emblemizes, not even gender—especially not gender—escapes the problematic of the construction of the subject.²³ When, at every step of the way, the process of reading Petrarch's sonnet involves taking responsibility for the way one necessarily rewrites it, this rewriting also necessarily becomes a rewriting of the subject who reads. "Male" and "female" reading subjects, in this instance, are alike permitted the pleasure, or anxiety, or both, of occupying a kind of rhetorical space in which their own "positions" are anything but fixed. In this sense, too, text and subject (whether the subject is understood as the writing subject or the reading subject) are not separable and are open at any and all moments to change.

What can we make "historically," then, of these differences between Petrarch's sonnet and Wyatt's and Surrey's renditions of it? Before trying to answer that question, I would like to detour for a moment through one of Jacques Derrida's best-known essays "La Différance." I do so, not necessarily to find a philosophical account of what we might mean when we talk about differences, though something like that may turn up, but to offer a third example of translation that repeats, in a curious way, the examples of Wyatt's and Surrey's translations of Petrarch. In a paragraph a few pages into the essay, Derrida's text goes to great lengths to enact rhetorically as well as to discuss thematically, a problem posed by the task of writing about writing, a task not unlike, we are now in a position to see, writing about the subject:

Comment vais-je m'y prendre pour parler du *a* de la différence? Il va de soi que celle-ci ne saurait être *exposée*. On ne peut jamais exposer que ce qui à un certain moment peut devenir *présent*, manifeste, ce qui peut se montrer, se présenter comme un présent, un étant-présent dans sa vérité, vérité d'un présent ou présence du présent. Or si la différence est (je mets aussi le "est" sous rature) ce qui rend possible la présentation de l'étant-présent, elle ne se présente jamais comme telle. Elle ne se donne jamais au présent. A personne. Se réservant et ne s'exposant pas, elle excède en ce point précis et de manière réglée l'ordre de la vérité, sans pour autant se dissimuler, comme quelque chose, comme un étant mystérieux, dans l'occulte d'un non-savoir ou dans un trou dont les bordures seraient déterminables (par exemple en une topologie de la castration). En toute exposition elle serait exposée à disparaître comme disparition. Elle risquerait d'apparaître: de disparaître.²⁴

The paragraph begins with a version of the very question, "What may I do?" upon which both Petrarch's and Wyatt's sonnets hinge. Derrida's text draws the question out—"Comment vais-je m'y prendre" or, literally,

"How am I going to take myself . . . ?"—in a way that emphasizes the issue of the subject's representation in language raised in Petrarch's poem. The subsequent description of the relationship between *différance*, which, in French is gendered feminine, and the masculine *l'étant-présent*, strikingly resembles the description I have developed of the relationship between lovers and beloveds in all three sonnets. In all four cases it is "she" who enables the presentation of a masculine being or presence. The differences among them have to do with the status of that "she." In Wyatt's and Surrey's sonnets, of course, "she" is dissimulated as some being (*un étant*), who does not exceed the order of truth, whereas in Derrida's text the trajectory of the gender play seems closer to that in Petrarch's sonnet. To speak of the "a" in *différance* necessarily involves the philosopher (a lover of wisdom) in a betrayal of "her" that might make her look as if she is the one playing coy games ("*Elle ne se présente jamais comme telle. Elle ne se donne jamais au présent*"), but that also betrays this appearance and the enunciating subject, the "je," who takes recourse in it, as themselves functions of the operation of "*différance*" (another name for "desire" as I have been using the term).

This philosopher also signals with his gender game something about a difference (spelled with an "e") enabled by, but not coincident with, *différance*. The game is identified as one invented and played by a heterosexual male, not, in other words, by a universal, subject. This representing subject, that is, presumes to speak neither for nor from the perspective of, all other subjects. It represents itself as partial and indeterminate simultaneously with its attempt to speak of the "a" of "*différance*," which, it claims, underwrites the appearance of being. Thus, by implication, this very account of the problematic of *différance* is itself doubly qualified as contingent, conditional, and positioned—on the one hand, by the philosopher's performative account of the impossibility of representing that which enables representation, on the other hand, by his self-representation as a subject caught in one particular illusory subject position. It signifies "historically" that this is the same gender position occupied by the "sovereign" male subject, who has tended in some Western philosophical and historical discourses to indulge in a rhetoric of authority, a practice for which neither Derrida nor Petrarch seems to find language at all well-suited.

Both these levels of rhetorical activity are obscured in Alan Bass's English translation of this paragraph from "La Différance." Beginning with the nonreflexive question "What am I to do?" little, if any, attention is given to the precise and layered performance of the French text. Indeed, gender and sex are completely eliminated from view. As one consequence, I think the paragraph in English reads, by comparison, as

precious rather than playful, reductively doctrinaire rather than rigorously and continuously in motion:

What am I to do in order to speak of the *a* of *différance*? It goes without saying that it cannot be *exposed*. One can expose only that which at a certain moment can become *present*, manifest, that which can be shown, presented as something present, a being-present in its truth, in the truth of a present or the presence of the present. Now if *différance* is (and I also cross out the "is") what makes possible the presentation of the being-present, it is never presented as such. It is never offered to the present. Or to anyone. Reserving itself, not exposing itself, in regular fashion it exceeds the order of truth at a certain precise point, but without dissimulating itself as something, as a mysterious being, in the occult of a nonknowledge or in a hole with indeterminable borders (for example, in a topology of castration). In every exposition it would be exposed to disappearing as disappearance. It would risk appearing: disappearing.²⁵

It seems an affectation for Bass's "I" to cross out "is" after "*différance*" since this "*différance*," referred to invariably as "it," has been transformed grammatically into precisely the kind objectified concept that does appear to "be" and whose function here seems to be to aggrandize the unproblematic "I" who so cleverly puts it through its paces. This "*différance*" has no will of its own—it passively suffers itself to be "never offered to the present, never presented as such," rather than reflexively not presenting herself as such or not offering herself to the present—so it/she does not seem to activate any real anxiety about the structural limits of mastery, and there does not seem to be much reason for all the fuss. I sympathize with all the readers, New Historicist and otherwise, for whom this is "theory" and who find it apolitical or politically reactionary and tedious to boot.

It appears from the vantage we have constructed here, when I include Derrida and Bass in my textual configuration, that American New Historicism and the American translation and assimilation of Continental theory may be in cahoots (unbeknownst to themselves) conceptually in the way they construct their objects of study—be it texts from the past or textuality per se. Whatever the conscious politics of its practitioners might be, what we might call the essentially realist epistemology of American academia's notion of knowledge (identifiable in "old" literary history as well as in New Historicism and American deconstruction) has built into it a denial of difference, including sexual and gender difference. The kind of unproblematized universalizing of the subject position that we see taking place in the difference between Derrida's text and Bass's tacitly privileges and perpetuates, rather than locates, the universalizing, autonomous (male) subject.

In the trajectory of my own readings and arguments, my intention has been to locate that subject in relation to contrasting presentations of male subjects. In so doing, I have necessarily complicated our assurance that we *know* where anyone is or was, but this complication, I trust, rather than bringing in its wake impotent confusion, will point toward other ways that a historicized historicism, not necessarily at odds with, or even separable from, deconstructive theory, can (dis)place us in a transforming relation to the past.

NOTES

1. See, for example, Robert Langbaum's introduction to the Signet edition of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, ed. Robert Langbaum (New York and Scarborough, Ontario: New American Library, 1964), xxi–xxxiv, to offer a random instance of the moralizing style of literary history commonly found in U.S. English departments until a post-Viet Nam generation of scholars, including feminists and theorists of colonialism, began to challenge this view of a unified and readily accessible "history of ideas." Langbaum writes: .

There is no question as to which view of nature Shakespeare adheres to. He presents here, as in the history plays and the tragedies, a grand vision of order in nature and society. . . . Caliban's crime in conspiring against Prospero is a sin against degree—like the plot of Antonio and Sebastian against Alonso, and Antonio's usurpation of Prospero's throne. Prospero erred in attempting to educate Caliban, just as he erred in allowing Antonio to play the duke in Milan. In both cases, he blurred distinctions of degree and helped create the disorder that followed. (p. xxvi)

And further on he writes: "With its bias against realism, and its interest in symbolic art, our time is better equipped than any time since Shakespeare's to appreciate the last plays. The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries liked best of all Shakespeare's early comedies. The nineteenth century liked the tragedies best, and on the whole we still do. But it may be that the last plays—and especially *The Tempest*, which is as I see it the best of them—will in future have most to say to us" (p. xxxiv). Note the emphasis on judgment. The student is asked to judge (or rather to accept the critic's judgment of) the morality of characters' behavior and the aesthetic success of the text in representing that behavior. Neither these judgments, nor the ideas and dramatic strategies of "Shakespeare" are ever portrayed as positional except insofar as they seem to belong to different "centuries," which have arbitrarily, but conveniently, different tastes from one another.

2. Louis Montrose, "Renaissance Literary Studies and the Subject of History," *English Literary Renaissance* 16 (1986), p. 6.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

4. In her introduction to this volume, Janet Smarr has already ably reviewed

the evolution over the last two decades, largely initiated by Hayden White, of historiographical theory, a field that has received surprisingly little attention from New Historicists. Here, though space does not permit me to discuss their work, I would also like to call attention to the implications for historiography of such feminist works as Joan Kelly's *Women, History, and Theory*, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), and Joan Wallach Scott's *Gender and the Politics of History*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), as well as the work of theoreticians/historians/readers of colonialism such as Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak. See, for example, Homi Bhabha, "Articulating the Archaic: Notes on Colonial Nonsense," Talk delivered at "History/Event/Discourse" conference, UCLA, January, 1989. Also see Gayatri Spivak, "The New Historicisms: Political Commitment and the Postmodern Critic," in *The New Historicism*, ed. H. Aram Veesser (New York: Routledge, 1989), and *Selected Subaltern Studies*, ed. with Ranajit Guha (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

5. As Schor explains in "This Essentialism Which Is Not One: Coming to Grips with Irigaray," *differences* 1 (1989):

If othering involves attributing to the objectified other a difference that serves to legitimate her oppression, naming denies the objectified other the right to her difference, submitting the other to the laws of phallic specularity. If othering assumes that the other is knowable, naming precludes any knowledge of the other in her otherness. If exposing the logic of othering—whether it be of women, Jews, or any other victims of demeaning stereotyping—is a necessary step in achieving equality, exposing the logic of naming is a necessary step in toppling the universal from his (her) pedestal.

Since othering and naming conspire in the oppression of women, the workings of both processes need to be exposed. (pp. 45–46)

6. I am working from a long manuscript, entitled "The Gendering of Melancholia: Torquato Tasso and Isabella di Morra," part of which was delivered at the 1989 MLA. Since then a briefer version of Schiesari's argument has appeared as "Mo(u)rning and Melancholia: Tasso and the Dawn of Psychoanalysis," *Quaderni d'italianistica* 11 (1990), pp. 13–27. The passage I quote is on page 3 of the longer manuscript.

7. Dominick LaCapra's contention, in *Rethinking Literary History: Texts, Contexts, Language* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), pp. 31–32, that the performative aspects of "literary" works themselves constitute an object of historical study is highly compatible with my interest in differences among what I am calling rhetorical constructions of the subject. My project here is also related conceptually to the dialogical, intertextual reading, advocated by Jean Howard and Leigh DeNeef, from which one derives a "historical" record not otherwise available. See Jean Howard, "The New Historicism in Renaissance Studies," in *Renaissance Historicism*, ed. Arthur Kinney and Dan Collins (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1987), p. 19, and

DeNeef, "Of Dialogues and Historicisms," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 86:4 (1987), pp. 511–12.

8. This version of "The longe love" is to be found in the excellent edition, Sir Thomas Wyatt, *Collected Poems*, ed. Kenneth Muir and Patricia Thomson (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1969), p. 3.

9. Jacques Lacan is our major contemporary theoretician of desire as lack. St. Augustine, most notably and accessibly in *The Confessions*, spells out the theological significance of so defining desire. This definition is contested by a range of French and American feminists and gay and lesbian theorists who criticize its implicit model of identity as substance or essence and its implicatedness in the binarism of (hetero)sexism. See, for example, Sue Ellen Case's introduction to her edited volume *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theater* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), p. 6.

10. E. M. W. Tillyard, *The Poetry of Sir Thomas Wyatt: A Selection and a Study* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1949), pp. 48, 33.

11. Thomas M. Greene, *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982), pp. 247–48, 256. Other critics who have written in the same vein include Hallett Smith, "The Art of Sir Thomas Wyatt," *The Huntington Library Quarterly*, 4 (1946), pp. 323–55; and Douglas Peterson, *The English Lyric from Wyatt to Donne: A History of the Plain and Eloquent Styles* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967).

12. Patricia Thomson, "The First English Petrarchans," *The Huntington Library Quarterly* 22 (1959), p. 86. All further citations are quoted from this article and identified by page number. See also Thomson's book, *Sir Thomas Wyatt and his Background* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1964).

13. I use the edition, Francesco Petrarca, *Canzoniere*, ed. Gianfranco Contini with notes by Daniele Ponchiroli (Torino: Einaudi, 1968), p. 195.

14. This translation is partly adapted from Robert M. Durling's dual language edition, *Petrarch's Lyric Poems: The Rime sparse and Other Lyrics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 284. Durling, however, does not attempt to indicate the syntactical reversibility and the lexical polyvocality of Petrarch's sonnet.

15. Schor, "This Essentialism Which Is Not One," p. 45.

16. I present a fuller discussion of this dynamic, discussed in the context of Wyatt's "Whoso list to hunt," in "Academic Tootsie: The Denial of Difference and the Difference it Makes," *diacritics* 17 (1987), pp. 2–20. See esp. p. 12.

17. This version of Surrey's sonnet is quoted from Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey's *Poems*, ed. Emrys Jones (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1964), p. 3.

18. Laura Mulvey and Teresa de Lauretis have both provocatively argued that, in fact, linear narrative "fits in," as Mulvey puts it, with the construction of a sadistic subject. In her 1975 *Screen* article, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," reprinted in *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), pp. 14–26, she suggested that "Sadism demands a story,

depends on making something happen, forcing a change in another person, a battle of will and strength, victory/defeat, all occurring in a linear time with a beginning and an end." (p. 22) De Lauretis, in *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), p. 132, considers how the formula works in reverse: "Story demands sadism."

19. Lauro Martinez's essay, "The Politics of Love Poetry," in this volume suggests that the figure of the beloved, the way sexuality is conceptualized, and the structure and reproduction of political power are all interrelated. Such relationships were also the subject of a conference sponsored by *Genders* on "Nationalisms and Sexualities" held at Harvard University in June, 1989. The proceedings of this conference were published in *Nationalisms and Sexualities*, ed. Andrew Parker, Mary Russo, Doris Sommer, and Patricia Yaeger (New York: Routledge, 1992). In "Academic Tootsie," p. 12, I have sketched out the relationship between male sexuality and the structure of Henry VIII's court that I see displayed in Wyatt's "Whoso list to hunt," but space does not permit me to pursue this fascinating issue here.

20. This problematic has been formulated many times in both deconstructive and psychoanalytic theory. See, for example, Paul de Man's essay "Allegory (Julie)" in *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979): "Like 'man,' 'love' is a figure that disfigures, a metaphor that confers the illusion of proper meaning to a suspended, open semantic structure. In the naively referential language of the affections, this makes love into the forever-repeated chimera, the monster of its own aberration, always oriented toward the future of its repetition, since the undoing of the illusion only sharpens the uncertainty that created the illusion in the first place. In this same affective language, the referential error is called desire" (p. 198). Lacan places desire at the center of his psychoanalytical theory and represents it as "a perpetual effect of symbolic articulation," to borrow Alan Sheridan's phrase in his translator's introduction to *Ecrits: A Selection* (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1977), p. viii. About one of Derrida's many formulations of this problematic, I will have more to say at the conclusion of this essay.

21. In both the *Canzoniere* and the *Trionfi*, I have come to believe, Petrarch is often engaged in literary experiments that enact conversations between "writing" (as defined and practiced within the hegemonic, imperial Latin tradition) and the semiotically different oral, visual, and performative textualities of vigorous vernacular cultures. I discuss what I take to be the political and historical import of one of these experiments, in "Petrarch's *Triumphs* and the Spectacle of Society," in *Petrarch's Triumphs: Allegory and Spectacle*, ed. Konrad Eisenbichler and Amilcare A. Iannucci (Ottawa: Dovehouse Editions, 1990), pp. 349-358. See also Domenico Pietropaolo's "Spectacular Literacy and the Topology of Significance: The Processional Mode," in *Ibid.*, pp. 359-368.

22. This death of the subject might be related to Foucault's discussion in *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Pantheon, 1970) of a similar demise of the subject in what has come to be known as the

postmodern episteme. I find it easier to think of the subject in question as an ideological chimera that corresponds to and is one aspect of the history of absolutist power in western European cultures. Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha have both illuminated, from various colonial perspectives, how open to renegotiation subjectivity can be and how constantly it is being negotiated. See Spivak, *Selected Subaltern Studies* and Bhabha, "Colonial Nonsense."

23. It is tempting to compare Petrarch's gender play in the *Canzoniere* to the excellent work of Judith Butler on the deconstruction of gender identities. See her book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990). Though Petrarch and Butler make several of the same moves, these moves do not necessarily "mean" the same thing, of course. On the other hand, Butler's work, allows me to give Petrarch's gestures a significance they did not have before, while, from the perspective of Petrarch's poetry I find that Butler's work has an unexpected and exciting historical resonance. The feminist deconstruction of gender does not seem such an isolated, isolating activity. This is one kind of history that can be made when positions remain permeable to one another.

24. Jacques Derrida, "La Différance," in *Marges de la philosophie* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1972), p. 6.

25. Jacques Derrida, "Différance," in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 6.